

THROMBOSIS AND EMBOLUS, ARTERIAL



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Blood-clot formation in an artery (thrombosis) that may travel to distant organs (embolus). This involves the large or medium arteries anywhere in the body, especially arteries in the neck or arteries to the brain, intestine, legs, arms or kidney.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following depend on where the embolus lodges:

- Brain: Temporary blindness, speaking difficulty, partial paralysis, hearing loss, headache and dizziness.
- Extremities: Pain in the arm or calf after exercise (subsides with rest); weakness, numbness, burning and tingling sensations; weak or absent pulse beyond the blocked blood flow. These symptoms subside with rest.
- Intestine: Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and shock.

CAUSES

Clots may form with any condition that damages the smooth lining of the heart or a blood vessel. As the clot grows, small or large portions break away and are carried by the bloodstream to the brain, abdomen, extremities or other areas.

Conditions that damage the blood-vessel lining include:

- Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries).
- Injury to a blood vessel from accident or surgery.
- Heart valve disease.
- Heat attack.
- Atrial fibrillation.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Adults over 60.
- Smoking.
- High blood pressure.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Previous transient ischemic attacks.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- If you have high blood pressure or diabetes mellitus, adhere to your treatment program to control the disease.
- Take anticoagulant drugs for a short time after injury or surgery to prevent blood clots.
- Exercise regularly to keep blood vessels healthy.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Depends on the organs affected, size of the affected blood vessel and size of the embolus. Clots in the extremities can be removed with surgery, relieving symptoms. Clots to the brain, kidney and intestines may cause death or permanent disability before they can be removed.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Tissue death or gangrene in cells deprived of oxygen by a clot.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include venography or arteriography (x-rays of the blood vessels after injection of a radiopaque substance).
- Early treatment is essential and usually requires surgery (embolectomy).
- Surgery to repair or replace damaged blood vessels, or to remove an embolus by suction or bypass.

MEDICATIONS

- Anticoagulants to thin the blood and reduce the chance of embolus.
- Vasodilators to widen blood vessels.

ACTIVITY

Complete rest is necessary until circulation is re-established by surgery or other treatment.

DIET

No special diet during recovery. However, atherosclerosis and diabetes require dietary control.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of arterial thrombosis or embolus. This is an emergency! Get medical help immediately.
- Symptoms return after surgery.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.